

FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY IN LATIN AMERICA

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--- Julia Lesage

Three dominant production styles have shaped media made by Latin American women over the last fifteen years, especially film and video made specifically about women's concerns. A few women work as independent artists trying to create a new film and video language to express women's experience in new ways. Such an artist's work often derives from an analysis of the ideological constraints inherent in traditional cultural structures and institutions. She strives to free both her own work and her audiences from dependence on traditional, class-bound, gender-inflected forms.

More frequently, Latin American women have entered into media production as part of a collective political effort, usually making traditionally structured documentaries with feminist goals.¹ In terms of production process, the feminist media groups have tried new forms of collaboration with each other and with their subjects.

The third common style is to work in a mixed-sex, often left, production group to depict the situation of the poor or an acute social problem. In Cuba and Nicaragua, such women artists usually work within established media institutions, and in the rest of Latin America, they often work as part organized mass movements against oppression. The collectives, both feminist and socialist, frequently do film and video distribution. Their projects in this area range from establishing distribution companies and videotheques to showing film/video to trade union groups and in poor neighborhoods in the streets. In practice, Latin American women media makers often move from one style of production to another, for example, from making a documentary for a campaign against rape to making a more expressive work about women's emotional life or domestic world.

Few women in Latin America have had the chance to direct feature fiction or produce television. When they have had such an entré, they could rarely focus on women's concerns. As in the rest of the third world,

few Latin women have had the chance to develop the media skills needed to enter into these positions nor access to the financial or institutional backing to embark on large-scale media projects. Furthermore, all third world directors, male and female, have little entry into the multinational media production and distribution networks dominated by Europe and the United States. What has assisted the growth of Latin American women's media making over the last fifteen years is the artists' participation in international feminist gatherings, where they have shared a common anti-imperialist perspective, promoted exhibitions of film and video by women, and established on-going women's media networks.² Furthermore, the spread of consumer-format video technology has led to an extensive use of video in Latin America, especially among independent artists and media groups working within movements for social change.³

Different social circumstances create different opportunities for and limits on women's media production. In this essay I will offer an example of each of the above three styles of media production and trace how the film/videomakers' political concerns, media production processes, and aesthetic choices are related. To do this, I will draw on a close analysis of an example of each artist's or group's work and on interviews (in some instances, on personal conversations) in which they discuss their history and political and aesthetic goals. I am particularly interested in examining the relation between the artists' production processes, political goals, and certain formal aspects of their work -- visual construction, use of music, and narrative structure. As a feminist video maker who has made documentaries about and with Nicaraguans, I have something personal at stake in this critical evaluation, for I am concerned with the relation between formal choices, political goals, and my own social situation as I do media work. In particular, I have found no one solution to the formal problems facing me as I construct intercultural feminist representations needed for political use in the United States.⁴

The representative film and videomakers whose documentary work I analyze here are these: Chilean exile, Valeria Sarmiento, and her feature-length film, *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN (UN HOMBRE CUANDO*

ES HOMBRE); the Colombian feminist media collective, Cine-Mujer, and their biographical documentary film, CARMEN CARRASCAL; and the Nicaraguan Taller Popular de Video "Timoteo Velasquez" (Video Workshop) of the Sandinista industrial workers trade union (CST) and the salaried farmworkers union (ATC) with their videotape, LA DALIA.⁵

Valeria Sarmiento learned filmmaking at the University of Valparaiso during Chile's Popular Unity period and has made most of her films in exile in France. Her 66-minute documentary *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* analytically depicts a whole range of social and cinematic structures that reinforce patriarchy. To show this mix of interacting ideological structures, she interweaves sequences of interviews, mostly with men, with sequences of mariachis performing in an outdoor setting and images of Jorge Negrete, a film idol from old Mexican films. Sarmiento says that from exile, her distance from Latin America allows her to express a new kind of critical perspective, a more synthetic one. Living in a different cultural context influences her view of her original culture, especially in terms of how she analyzes sexual politics or sees connections between European and Latin life.⁶

In contrast, both in subject matter and style of production, Cine-Mujer's film CARMEN CARRASCAL is similar to the documentaries made in the 70s in the United States in the context of the women's movement there. Cine-Mujer is a women's filmmaking collective founded by professional women in a capital city, Bogota, who wanted to find non-hierarchical ways of making films together and to create representative works which would take up important women's themes and be useful in organizing. Reflecting their feminist consciousness, they gave much thought to the process of making CARMEN CARRASCAL -- both to their personal and political relation with their subject, a farm woman living on the Atlantic coast of Colombia, and to how they structured the film's script.

The third group includes women working within a mixed-sex video group, Taller Popular de Video, serving the Sandinista trade union movement in Nicaragua. Entering members learn videomaking skills (usually one role --camera, sound, editing) according to the group's current needs. Periodically the group makes tapes specifically about women's lives and concerns, and often the principal speaker or "voice of authority" in their documentary videos is female. Building the Nicaraguan revolution is the Taller's main concern. Because the video makers come from poor families, and are oriented politically toward the working class and peasantry, their documentaries seem not just about but from the people filmed.

VALERIA SARMIENTO -- INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER IN EXILE

Valeria Sarmiento learned filmmaking during Chile's Popular Unity period but she could not get funding to do a film about women's condition; she faced both technical and attitudinal obstacles, especially sexism in the film industry, even among socialists.⁷ In Chile in 1972, with her own financial resources,

she did make *UN MUNDO COMO DE COLORES*, a 20-minute, black and white documentary film about two strippers. Sarmiento recounts:

I have a scene in which the first stripper, who lives in a slum, says with great pride that, thanks to her work, she bought a refrigerator and a dining room set. Really, the film deals with the ambiguity in which the dancers live, selling themselves as sex objects and then buying some liberty because of that.⁸

Shown privately, the film was not well received because it seemed tangential to the political process Chile was going through. In a similar vein, Sarmiento's first film made in France in exile analyzed the consciousness of the bourgeois "women of the pots and pans," that is, middle class women who had been moved by right wing scare tactics to demonstrate against the Allende government. Called *LA FEMME AU FOYER* (*THE HOUSEWIFE*) Sarmiento's film presented a claustrophobic mixture of a day in the life of a housewife intercut with shots of bourgeois women saluting the planes attacking Santiago. At this time (1976), most of the other filmmakers from Chile were making solidarity media that condemned the military, and they rejected Sarmiento's second film. In that sense, Sarmiento began by making political films, but she has always been both a political and aesthetic maverick, using formal innovation to express her political perspective. It is a tendency that she recognizes in her own work:

I think that it (my work) searches for a personal language and that to the degree that I keep making films, I'll clarify that language more and more, so as to reveal a world that is not obvious. All my films invoke a different kind of vision, but one based on elements from daily life.⁹

With the same knack for revealing political contradictions, Sarmiento proceeded to make several films about Chilean exiles in France. In *LA MAL DU PAYS* (*THE BAD THING ABOUT THIS COUNTRY*, 1979), for example, exiled working-class Chilean children, aged five to eight, who had just arrived from the Santiago slums, say they would like to return home but to a house like they have now in France. As Sarmiento put it,

These children already had such a strange memory of Chile. ... Some had a vision of French comforts and wanted to hang on to them.¹⁰

In France, Sarmiento found work as a film editor. This was her choice and also a necessity, since in her early years in exile the family faced economic difficulties and she had to put food on the table.¹¹ Later, she could not easily break out of that job into directing. The French film industry (and the governmental system of pre-production loans) classifies filmmakers as either editors or directors. Also, because she is married to film director Raul Ruiz, funders either thought her work would be derivative of Ruiz's or that he, not she, deserved funding. However, she feels that keeping on in film production as an editor has allowed her constantly to refine her filmmaking skills.¹²

Because she is living in Europe, Valeria Sarmiento has the economic opportunity to make "thrifty" independent cinema -- like many independent media artists in the United States and Europe. She received 100,000 DM to make the *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* which covered all production expenses, including crew's salary and travel expenses to Latin America as well as making final prints. The film had limited success, shown first on German television, then in an edited version on French television, and now in 16mm distribution in the United States and France. (In the United States it is a feminist distribution company, Women Make Movies, that carries the film.)

When a German tv producer funded *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN*, Sarmiento filmed in Costa Rica, partly because that was the only country in Latin America where she could get a visa at the time she was financially ready to begin production but also because nationality was not a major consideration. Sarmiento saw her theme as a Latin American one, not specific to any one country.¹³ In that sense, the film is both "feminist" and "Latin" in broadly generalizable terms.

Later, Sarmiento commented that she was lucky that she had turned down Costa Rica's offer of a co-production, because had she accepted, *AMAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* "would have been like my Chilean film, destroyed or locked up somewhere."¹⁴ After the film was shown on French television, the Costa Rican government protested that she had presented their people unfairly, especially Costa Rican women. A blame-the-victim mentality can be seen in the letter the Costa Rican charge d'affaires in France wrote on embassy stationery to the director of French television's Channel 2, which was printed in *Le Monde*. He wrote about the film,

It is a defamatory campaign against Latin American women, especially Costa Rican women. In letting adolescents, prostitutes, and murderers speak, the director presents an image of the Latin American woman as easy to conquer and as a sex object, without value, while men are presented as "macho."¹⁵

Sarmiento began her filmmaking career presenting an "unpopular" point of view. In her later work she continues to develop a perspective on some of the most painful, and therefore unexplored, contradictions in both women's, children's, and working class people's lives. At the same time, she develops new media forms to present and expose the social and discursive structures that work to keep those contradictions underground.

I never thought you can change people with a film. You can only show a situation, leaving people free to think about it or not. Of course, I use editing to select certain material and I choose how to organize it, so I present my thoughts and speak my mind, but without imposing it. I refuse to use any kind of explicit narrative voice. ... Every time I have shown this film, I have had problems. In France I have had to defend it among the Latin Americans in exile. They want political films. People on the

left never want to pose the problem of sexism except as an "internal issue" or "after the Revolution." Now I think that you have to take up the issue [of sexism] beforehand because if not, afterward, you'll always have it around.¹⁶

A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN: NARRATIVE ACCUMULATION

Sarmiento's work cloaks rage in an elegant style. At first, *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* seems both witty and aggressive, especially in its attack on machismo and on the idealized, traditional gender roles perpetuated by the myth of romantic love. When we take a look at its total construction, however, *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* exposes analytically a whole set of attitudes, behaviors, and cultural patterns which sustain male privilege, particularly in a Latin American context.

The film has a narrative polish in which every element reflects an auteur's political and aesthetic control. *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* increases in irony and tension, so that the viewer is "misled" by the normality of the interviews and the lightheartedness of the music and the musical performance sequences. The film collects details from everyday life, and this accumulation become progressively more sinister toward the end of the film. As Sarmiento evaluates the film's impact:

After seeing *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN*, no one can fail to recognize that this is an everyday phenomenon. The small details that keep accumulating form a threatening whole.¹⁷

The narrative structure seems shaped by a woman's self-conscious rejection of the fraudulent promises and consequences of the romantic love myth. In the narrative construction, established at the editing stage, Sarmiento analyzes a range of social patterns and cultural institutions that depend on romanticizing male dominance and female subordination.¹⁸

A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN is mostly about men. ... I had to demonstrate who those characters were, very attractive and simpatico men, and that there is a whole folklore around machismo that is very popular, too. In our popular film tradition, stars like Jorge Negrete project that image--that is to say, there's a whole process of conditioning.¹⁹

As one watches *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN*, it seems that all the people interviewed reveal their frankest opinions. The interviews and the images indict principally men for unscrupulously exploiting women sexually, but a few sequences show women's complicity in their own oppression. For example, a young woman sitting in a living room compares the traits of Latin and European lovers, and she also tells how the women in her family collude with her brother's lies when he brings lovers home for dinner and introduces each as his wife.²⁰

Members of the audience for *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* usually vary as to the point at which they sense

that an outrageous kind of sexism is being depicted. The images and situations are carefully constructed so that some viewers may interpret them as depicting social experiences that are very "ordinary." For example, opening sequences go from an extreme close-up of grandmotherly hands' piercing a baby girl's ears to a girls' sewing class, where the teacher demonstrates how the girls can do invisible mending -- so they can repair daddy's suit when he burns a hole in it with a cigarette ash. Later sequences interview two adolescent males, each filmed in a "normal" living room environment and each conventionally handsome -- they both talk about common sexual experiences that they and their friends have had, what they expect from girls they date, and what they want from a wife.

I did not hinder people from expressing themselves and I did not twist their testimony. That is why I never put a commentary over documents I have collected.²¹

A later interview shows a taxi driver who drives around as he talks about his sexual appetites, admonishing us that a man has to make a pass at a woman right away. He uses the following metaphor: "You have to eat the bread while it's hot, or otherwise you'll have a hell of a time sticking a tooth in." Sarmiento's tour-de-force is that she shows him with three of his wives, in their respective homes. The furnishings indicate that he is a good provider, a trait which each of his wives praises him for.

Those Latin American machos are very romantic, and the more macho they are, the more romantic they are.²²

The narrative climax is structured in a low-key and ironic way. It exposes a brutal social reality beneath the ideology of romantic love, an ideology which Sarmiento exposes as serving men's interest throughout the film. Brutality is not conveyed visually but only by the words that the men speak. Two interviews filmed against neutral outdoor backgrounds each show a man addressing the camera. The first man said his wife, who had taunted him with infidelity and whom he had tried to win back, served him on a china plate, mockingly treating him like a guest. "I was alteredado," he said. The other related that when his wife was going out to work, he told her he would support her. "'I don't care,' she said. That's why I killed her."

In a sense the scenes with these men are edited backwards. We are told that they killed their wives only at the end of the episode. Thus, some viewers are led to sympathize with these "poor men" who tried to do everything for their wives, before the shocking revelation that they are murderers. Sarmiento admits that this kind of editing sets a "trap" but she justifies herself in this way:

At first everyone's going along with the film and saying, "Oh, machismo is so ugly." Suddenly they begin listening to those men complain about women--"She was humiliating me, bla, bla, bla." Then a lot of viewers believe the men are suffering because of women--then suddenly they discover that no, the men killed the women. It's a trap I consider

necessary. That is, we listen first to what he says, then we discover he's an assassin. If you know right away that he's an assassin, then you'll listen to him differently, inclined to discount what he says.²³

EDITING STRATEGIES AND MUSIC AS TACTICS FOR DECONSTRUCTION

A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN has been received as either humorous or insulting. This contrast derives from the wit of its construction. As Sarmiento put it, it is a film de montage, that is, constructed in the editing. It intercuts interviews about family life and notions of sexuality with two kinds of musical sequences which show how Latin popular culture has traditionally presented romantic love. Sometimes we see a complete performance of a romantic ballad, sung by a group of traditionally costumed mariachis in some leafy glade. Other times we see black and white images of Jorge Negrete held on screen briefly and manipulated by repetition and brusque cutting on gesture. The editing here makes the actor's gestures of love and bravado seem foolish.

Music, in fact, gives the film its structure. Music punctuates the film. Yet the musical interludes often seem more pleasant or comic than critical. Although Sarmiento uses lyrics from exaggerated ballads about romantic love to comment humorously on the documentary sequences, it is not apparent at first why we should take these lyrics seriously. Jorge Negrete's face and sometimes his lyrics are literally punctuated by rapid editing; often a rapid cut or repetition emphasizes some ridiculous gesture of his mouth, smooth manner, big hat, or silly romantic gesture.

Often it seems that the musical interludes palliate the film's seriousness. In fact, the Latin American tradition of romantic cinema and longer tradition of romantic soulful ballads is the one thing in the film that it would be most difficult to get most Latin viewers to take seriously as "harmful" to women. Thus, as the musical sequences alternate with the interview sequences, Sarmiento creates a narrative structure in which the music comments on the "real people's" behavior, and the film as a whole comments on the ideology of romantic music and film. The seeming casualness or lightheartedness of that narrative structure is an analog to the way romantic ballads circulate in our culture and influence emotions in an ongoing way. The film's tone toward that music is both analytic and easygoing, creating awareness by laughter, even ridicule, rather than a denunciatory attack.

Artifice marks the visual background, exaggerated costumes, and performances of most of the musical interludes. This is especially true of the manipulation of the images of Jorge Negrete from Mexican cinema. One effect of this is to make the interviews' dramatic climax, where the convicts talk about killing their wives, so much of a surprise. In contrast to the interviews, the musical performances are set pieces, empty of narrative tension. An opening sequence shows a

folklore troop dancing on a broad lawn of a rich person's estate, perhaps the estate of the stud farm that opens the film. Shots just before the dance sequence had shown a stallion being brought to a mare (she had her hindfoot tied up so she could not kick), and then the schooling of a mare on a rope. As part of the folkdance, a youth lassoes a lassie. The dance itself is filmed in an elegant composition emphasizing symmetry and rows.

The mise-en-scene of this sequence establishes one of the film's major thematic concerns, the artifice of what people ordinarily take for granted as "natural"--especially, the oppression inherent in seemingly natural gender roles. The fact that Sarmiento includes entire musical performances in *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* alongside the interview sequences indicates that she is challenging traditional documentary form. She uses the fiction of the musical lyrics, juxtaposes artifice and nature in the mise-en-scene of the musical pieces, and uncovers the lies and the self-deception (i.e., the fictions) of the people filmed in an everyday milieu.

The use of the Negrete image and romantic songs seem to be one of the main ways that the film is directed at women viewers, whom Sarmiento wants to understand are complicit in their own oppression. Jorge Negrete was the most popular matinee idol in Latin American film in his day, and his day lasted many years. He offered viewers the ideal "mythic" version of the Latin American male. As Sarmiento edits his image, she exposes the inherent ridiculousness of the "ideal" Latin man, trying to dissolve a myth that still appeals to women into laughter.

Sarmiento uses humor like this early in *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* when she cuts Negrete's image and lyrics into a documentary sequence that shows how women start shaping the next generation into the female subject, for it is they who introduce infants into their role as girls. We see an older woman's hands, in extreme close-up, piercing a baby's ears and inserting earrings. On the soundtrack, we hear the baby's cries and the woman's soothing words. The sequence is jarring because of its framing and its existential quality -- the filming of a real baby's pain so deliberately and so close.

Intercut with this imagery is Jorge Negrete singing. Sometimes we see clips from Mexican cinema showing images of Negrete with a cigarette hanging insolently from his lips, Negrete with fighting cock in his arms, or other men's reactions to him in a cantina. His song runs under the scene of earpiercing and the baby's cries. On the sound track, he sings the song, Mujer (Woman):

I beg you not to be ungrateful or to make me suffer.....I love you so much that I would die without you....Your accepting me gives me my life and my heart....Love of all my loves.

And this same song, over an image of a full moon and ocean beach, ends the film and comments on it. The film itself has exposed the pain which is inflicted on women yet masked by the ideology of love. "Let me express the sweet truth that love's suffering can

bring," Negrete sings. Expressing that truth for women is just what the film has done.

Any editor of documentary films would understand this process of juxtaposition. Artifice always intrudes on documentary, both in the filming and in the editing. Yet the role of music in documentaries is rarely commented on. Here the artifice of the editing, especially the use of Negrete, is made highly visible. Even so, the deconstruction and consequent ideological analysis effected by this editing style is conveyed primarily by humor, especially humor juxtaposed against "brutality"--e.g., the ear piercing. Music gives *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* its structure, but the deconstruction is achieved in the way that music itself works, in more of an emotional than rational way.

PRODUCTION, POLITICAL CONCERNS, AESTHETIC FORM

Both from interviews which Sarmiento gave about making *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* and from looking at internal evidence in the film, we can draw some conclusions about Sarmiento's production process. She takes sole responsibility for the final version of the film. During the filming, neither her crew (two Chilean exiles, Leonardo de la Barra, cameraman, and Joachim Pinto, soundman) nor her subjects knew what the final work would be. The people filmed took the cameraman to be the director, and Sarmiento let it stand like that. She said that people liked to talk openly to her, a stranger, about sex and love, and even her crew believed they were making a film about romantic love.²⁴

Looking at the way the interviews are filmed, how the subjects act and the kinds of things they say, we can see that the people filmed wanted to talk about their lives, but that they did not feel intimate with the interviewer. Rather we get a sense of good natured participation. Furthermore, the texture of the footage comes less from regional specificity than from individuals telling about their lives and ideas in a way which lets them be interpreted as "types." Other images are filmed from the perspective of an onlooker, especially at a quinze años ball or in and around schools. The mariachi sequences shot outdoors are as carefully staged as a dance sequence in a Hollywood film, and the charm of these sequences comes both from the humor of the lyrics and the isolation of the singers from any social context at all. Editing the footage back in Europe, Sarmiento could juxtapose and make connections between broader aspects of Latin cultural life, particularly traditions of popular romantic music and film, and the specific situations of the individuals whom she had interviewed for the film.

Sarmiento has adopted a mode of production common to many independents. She prefers an artisanal, self-directed work process. She works within the tradition of the "political" avant-garde, in which the artist understands politically the need to create a new film/video language in order to take on new or previously unexplored social and personal themes.²⁵ It is perhaps because she had to go into exile that she devel-

oped both the aesthetic skill and the syncretic overview that allowed her to create a work which has the analytic power of *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN*, which dissects oppressive cultural and interpersonal structures.²⁶ As she puts it,

Now that I have the distance, I can reflect on what it means to be a Latin American. Europe has given me the chance to develop as an artist because it has given me the technical means to work in film. I could not have done it [these kinds of films] in Chile because people could only accept an image of themselves that was pleasing. Europe lets me put forth the image of Latin life that I must show.²⁷

The final interview in *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* is with a pharmacist, a genial older fellow, who says that what he wants is a woman who will appreciate the aesthetically finer things, like his cello playing, and say, "What is that beautiful piece? You play it so well. Please play it again." He says that is what his daughter, a single woman, does for him, and that is how a woman should live with a man.

As an independent media artist making films within a capitalist production and distribution structure, Sarmiento has inherited the cultural tradition of the outsider and artist from 19th century Romanticism. She exploits that tradition thematically in the way that she insists on exploring and presenting the "darker" contradictions which mainstream culture ignores. Following in the same vein as the interview with the pharmacist, Sarmiento's project after *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* is *OUR MARRIAGE*, a feature fiction in which a man marries his adopted daughter after his wife dies. The film's plot draws out the implications of incest inherent in that marriage tradition so common in Mediterranean and South American countries -- i.e., that a man marry a woman much younger than himself.²⁸ *OUR MARRIAGE* is based on a novel by Corin Tellado, the most well known author of the equivalent of Harlequin novels in Spanish. Sarmiento said that that her choice of a source grew out of her own past reading such novels, where eroticism is presented as a "transgression, always hidden."

We Latin American women grew up reading Corin Tellado. I'm working through an emotional history that's my own. It's very important to me.²⁹

Incest themes shape media culture as well as social life, but they are rarely commented on. Sarmiento's work foregrounds such deeper structural forms that shape both behavior and expressive means. Thus, she feels that her films elicit a gender-inflected response. As Sarmiento says about the reception of *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN*, when a macho viewer recognizes himself in that film, he responds, "Sure, we're that way. So what?"³⁰

On the other hand, women viewers are often led by the viewing of *A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN* to question the entire process of social conditioning, especially the romantic conventions found in popular culture which they so dearly enjoy, and to understand that this conditioning, from girlhood on, literally embeds them in the structures of their own oppression. Perhaps it is

only the woman artist working alone or as an auteurist director who can take on the most taboo themes. It is a difficult task for a feminist artist to present the social/psychological formations that women participate in (and do not usually want to see) and simultaneously to challenge the media structures that women enjoy. I suspect that such cinema or video depends on an individual woman's analysis of her own subjective formation. It would be difficult to make as a collective project, which, as I will demonstrate below, takes up hegemonic feminist themes and uses hegemonic media forms.³¹

CINE-MUJER -- WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FILMS

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many radical 16 mm film production groups in the United States attempted to incorporate principles of skill-sharing and non-hierarchical, collective scripting, filming, and editing. Many times this came about as a response to women's organized demands-- to learn to do camera work, to take directorial control, to make films explicitly from a woman's point of view. Few groups still work like this. Members of those groups sometimes dropped out of filmmaking, or sometime the group got a slightly larger budget to do a more ambitious, more commercially viable project -- the production of which had to be organized hierarchically because of economic and time constraints.

Political arguments hold up production, and irrevocable aesthetic and political choices must always be made, especially at the editing stage of a film or videotape. Furthermore, if the group gets enough funding to buy cameras and editing equipment, to rent office space and hire a staff, and to try to distribute films/tapes nationally or internationally, it becomes a small business. And as with apolitical small businesses, it faces the same dilemma they do: to incorporate principles of managerial efficiency or fold.³²

Cine-Mujer's history runs parallel to that of many such groups in the United States. For their first several productions, the group functioned in an utopian way -- making a work in which the politics and aesthetics of the piece were discussed and decided collectively at every stage of the production.³³ *CARMEN CARRASCAL*, one of these, is a film conceived of as important for the Colombian women's movement, and it is a work in which the collective shared both skills and economic resources.

Cine-Mujer's early projects have given two of its members, Sara Bright and Eulalia Carrizosa, the chance to become professional filmmakers, although marginally. The editing equipment the group bought allows the collective a source of income. Because of the cost of maintaining the equipment and the difficulty of getting spare parts, these women do not train other women, even though they understand the value of having short courses for women only. They acknowledge the class and race privilege at work in their ascent to filmmaking. Now the group is financially self-

supporting with money gained from distribution, renting equipment, and doing productions. Sometimes they can even pay themselves low wages but still have to work at other jobs.

In their early projects, Cine-Mujer did slide shows and short films on typical feminist issues--abortion, maids, the image of women in advertising. Over a period of two years, its four to six members struggled to find ways of working together collectively -- not only in terms of filmmaking but in rotating administrative, public relations, and fundraising chores. The same two years were spent on developing the script of CARMEN CARRASCAL.

Cine-Mujer received a substantial grant to make CARMEN CARRASCAL, and their budget allowed them to spend what would have been required to rent equipment in Bogota or flying to New York to buy used editing equipment and tape recorder. Similarly, it was cheaper to buy film stock in the United States, smuggle it out for processing, and then bring it back for editing. But that meant that everything had to be filmed in one shoot.

Carmen Carrascal had won a national prize for her basket weaving and had come with her daughter to Bogota to receive the prize. That is when the members of Cine-mujer first became aware of her. For pre-production on the film, members of Cine-Mujer first went to Carrascal's farm on the Atlantic coast in order to be with her in her own environment. They took still photos and recorded audio interviews with her. It was during that time that they began to develop an aesthetic for the film and a way of relating to her personally. They wanted to respect her time and her space. The second time the group went to the Atlantic Coast it was for their one and only shoot. During the editing stage, it was impossible to bring Carrascal to Bogota for consultation, but she was very moved by the final version that she saw in her village when Cine-mujer members came back with a Betamax half-inch video recorder and a cassette version of the film.³⁴

In a sense CARMEN CARRASCAL represents in its production both a dilemma and a partial solution to that dilemma. The dilemma is the relation between artists and intellectuals in an urban area and rural peoples, whose lives, concerns and points of view cry out for public expression. The farmwoman from the Atlantic coast and bourgeois feminists from the capital collaborated to make a biographical film, in which a woman whose voice is otherwise culturally underrepresented tells about her life.³⁵ The film depicts the life and craft of a rural artisan, Carmen Carrascal, with whom the crew obviously established great personal rapport. It is also a homage from media artists in the capital to a peasant artist -- for the film shows Carrascal's process of basket making from start to finish, with her giving explanations about what is involved in her craft. The filmmakers found an appropriate aesthetic form to deal with key social and personal issues -- the emotional tensions in Carrascal's life, the relation of rural people to the capital and to the national government, and rural women's sources of income, power and independence.

REPRESENTING RURAL LIFE

As Angela Davis brought to our attention in her ground-breaking essay, "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," rural family life among oppressed peoples has the potential for being the locus of revolutionary political organizing.³⁶ It also has to be looked at closely for the way it shapes women's lives and women's potential for growth. Among land reform programs in the third world, for example, only in Nicaragua have women not had to be heads of households to receive land.³⁷ In many areas, the consequence of social isolation, especially for rural women, is illiteracy, lack of knowledge about health and nutrition, and political powerlessness. CARMEN CARRASCAL presents both the strength of its protagonist and of her bonds to her children and fellow basket makers, but it does not romanticize rural life or present it sentimentally. Therein lies the film's usefulness to the women's movement internationally.

Furthermore, CARMEN CARRASCAL offers a close look at a rural woman's daily labor -- the time-consuming tasks of cooking over an open fire and preparing and making tortillas. Carrascal is shown to have an extraordinarily tender relation with her children. As she takes on the responsibility of animal husbandry, she raises a calf and speaks about her mule as if they were children, too. One sequence begins with a close-up of Carrascal's hands in food preparation; as the camera zooms back, we see her pouring milk into a bottle and putting on the nipple. She calls her little boy. We think the bottle is for him, but the next shot shows the small boy feeding it to a nursing calf. In a later series of shots we see Carrascal riding her mule to town to see her children, take them provisions, and sell baskets. She says the journey will last on into the night and that many men would fear that. But she trusts her old mule "who is like a daughter" to her.

Women's farm labor is often under-represented in national agricultural reports because women's unpaid family labor is not quantified or accounted for.³⁸ In particular, women often take on the unpaid chore of animal husbandry. In most rural or small town areas throughout the world, women make an important contribution to nutrition and/or cash income by raising a pig or chickens, or by keeping a cow or goats for milk. The Carrascals have land and a number of cattle. Even though their lives look poor, they are not part of the landless, migrating rural work force, which has so drastically increased where large multinational agricultural farms have dominated. In those cases, especially if the soil is poor or there are a lot of children and the oldest son inherits what little land remains in the family, there is a lot of male migration. The men go to the capital to look for work and often start another family there. Woman-headed households increasingly do the world's subsistence farming.

The film depicts a rural family that is economically secure enough to have achieved a stable way of life.

A small amount of cash in the house allows a little margin for risk-taking and imagining alternatives beyond subsistence farming. Often in such families, when women can generate an income, either by a craft such as Carrascal does, or by selling products locally, they can control more of the family's spending money. If there is any, the woman often uses it to provide better nutrition, education, or medical care for the children. In Carrascal's case, the alternative she insists on is education for the children.

Basket making brings Carmen Carrascal into the market economy, which gives her a certain amount of domestic independence but also brings her into conflict with the exploitative practices of the government-run craft shops. She and her husband argued about her going off to the local market to sell baskets, that is, to leave the domestic sphere. Yet such travel has led to her understanding how rural labor gets exploited. She has to pay increasingly high transportation costs to get her baskets to the store, with whom she has a contract but not a salary, as she would prefer. As Carrascal has sold her baskets, she has encountered and understood the operation of national barriers to rural progress. The government supports rural crafts but pays a very low price for the goods that will be resold to tourists. She gives this information to us in her own words as we see images of her packing her baskets on a mule and later on a car to go off to the capital.

Carrascal has empowered the people in town because she has taught many of the villagers in the nearest town, especially the women in two extended families, how to make baskets. She has also taught her craft to her daughters. She invented her own process for making and decorating baskets, and she says that if her daughters do not like to do it her way, they can invent a craft of their own.

CARMEN CARRASCAL looks at social structures and how they can gradually change to improve rural women's lives. It sees the relation between a rural woman's earning a cash income and her social growth and personal self esteem. And it does this by affirming the value of traditional social structures -- especially those maintained by women -- which offer women more paths for growth and support than do consumer-oriented urban ways.

PRODUCTION RELATIONS, NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, AND VISUAL EMPHASIS

In looking at A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN, it is clear that the entire structure of the film comes from the editor/director. However, in making CARMEN CARRASCAL, Cine-mujer's goal was collectively to make a film about a rural woman's life. They formed a close personal relation with their subject. Yet Carrascal could not participate in the editing, and even more important, a huge class and regional gap existed between the producers' and Carrascal's lives. Because such a gap exists in much of the third world between woman filmmaker and woman subject, it seems worthwhile to study this film for internal evidence that indicates how

the relation between bourgeois feminist filmmakers and farmwoman-subject may have influenced the final structure of the film.

The film's history has a unique relation to Carrascal's own history. After she returned home from the award ceremony in Bogota, her husband Humberto did not ask her about her award or what had happened on her trip. She narrates this in the film in voice-over as we see a tracking shot around her one-room house, noting the many baskets hanging from the ceiling, family photos, and the award along with a photo of her receiving it from the President of Bogota. She then tells us, facing the camera and wringing her hands, how she became mentally disturbed, and how her brother, a preacher, saved her.

In fact, when the members of Cine-mujer went to the Atlantic coast to collect audio interviews and shoot slides as pre-production planning, Carrascal had made up a song which she used to sing about her madness. The collective taped the song and used it later to introduce and conclude the film. In the film, Carrascal does not state that her husband's coldness caused her mental anguish, but she implies it:

When I came home I said, "These medals mean nothing to me," and a month later, I was a loca completa (completely mad).

The collective then spent about two years deciding how to assemble the footage into the film. While they were doing the final shoot, Carrascal had told them she did not want to sing the songs anymore because she did not want to remember the "bad time" (that line is in the film). However, the Cine-mujer collective was convinced that the song was a powerful statement of her condition, and in itself poetry and folk art. After much consideration they used it in the film, and in a very prominent way. They did not know how Carrascal would react to that aesthetic/political decision until she saw the final version of the film with them in a showing in her own village.

That filmmakers shape the filming situation so as to elicit an exceptionally dramatic moment is common practice in documentary film production. That the producers finally used Carrascal's "madness" song was less exploitative than it may seem. A great intimacy between subject and filmmakers is expressed in the interviews which structure the film's soundtrack. In particular, Carrascal's close-ups present a wide range of personal emotions from shyness to pride to her anxiety at remembering hard times. She talks about her relations with her husband, her determination to provide her children a better life in spite of what he thinks, her love for her mule, her craft, and her pride in teaching her craft to her neighbors. The sound track has the same effect as that of a U.S. feminist documentary film, a woman-to-woman discourse that redefines the rules of daily life in woman-centered terms.

Like cinema verite, CARMEN CARRASCAL presents its subject entirely in her own voice and her own words. However, the decisions made in the editing are not visible. The topics covered in the interviews with Carrascal have a contemporary feminist

emphasis on women's traditional crafts and on sexual politics, including discussion of contraception.⁴⁰ These emphases shape the narrative pace of the film. We do not know, however, if this is the way this woman would have articulated her condition when talking to her friends or relatives, or if the very fact of meeting the Cine-mujer collective and making the film allowed her to phrase issues in this way for the first time.

In general, documentary films all too easily cloak themselves in a guise of objectivity. Filmmakers' decisions about narrative strategies or even the questions they asked their subjects (formulated in the pre-production process) are not usually in a documentary film for viewers to evaluate. Nevertheless, cinema verite always leaves internal traces of its own production process. Within any cinema verite film, for example, is multiple evidence about the relation between filmmaker and person filmed. It is there in the subject's tone of voice, phrasing, eye contact, gestures, and the emotional depth with which that person tells the story of his/her life.

In this context, the producers of *CARMEN CARRASCAL* seem to have drawn on the good faith established between themselves and their subject so as to justify using her song in such a predominant way. The song speaks profoundly about a woman's pain. At the film's beginning, over the credits and over opening close-ups of palm fronds in the afternoon sun, Carrascal sings the following:

My name is Carmen Rosa Carrascal de Novoa.

Listen, Humberto, to what Carmen Carrascal has to say about lies and the truth.

I was sick in Coloso.

My brother cried and so did my children.

"Mama, you will completely collapse."

Jesus said, "Carmen Carrascal, nothing is going to happen to you.

You will return home unharmed."

The same song brackets the film's conclusion, with the addition of two more key lines:

When I was single, you called me darling, baby Carmen.

Now you don't call me darling, baby Carmen anymore.

The makers of *CARMEN CARRASCAL* both identified with their subject and respected her capacity for self-expression. In particular, they gave cinematic space in the film for and social respect to Carrascal's madness. She speaks openly in the film about marital tensions. In particular, she needs validation for self-worth which she has not readily found in the domestic sphere. Like many women, she focuses on the home world and her children. Her story of domestic anxiety evokes a common denominator of women's experience that many women viewers can identify with across national and cultural lines.

In the course of the film, the image track never shows Carrascal speaking to the filmmakers in the

presence of her husband. In fact, he only appears in a distant landscape in a long shot in the film. Three kinds of visual sequences are shown over the interviews. Most of these depict Carmen Carrascal. One kind of visual imagery show her doing domestic work, usually outside and usually with her children or animals in the scene. Another prolonged set of images returned to throughout the film shows her weaving a basket from start to finish and she does this with her children weaving alongside her. Another sequence shows her taking a long trip to town on her mule; she comments on how many men would be afraid to take that route in the dark, but not she. This sequence is, in a sense, representative of her entry into public space,

Of particular interest and very much a part of the feminist documentary tradition is the attention Cine-mujer pays to her craft. Labor is rarely represented at any length in cinema, unless it is the robbery in a heist film, and women's domestic labor or craft work even less so. Here Carrascal discusses both the history of her craft and its process, and we see the process at length. She tells how she invented this kind of basket making to make school bags for her children. We see the children helping her hack down palm fronds and tear the bark into strips for weaving. As she weaves, she is filmed in the lovely light of sunset, and we see the whole basket slowly taking form. The cinematic time spent in displaying this labor indicates another bond between subject and filmmaker. The filmmakers want to convey a vivid sense of domestic labor and of the value and beauty of women's craft. Carmen Carrascal is an attractive subject for a feminist biography partly because of the extraordinary skill with which she does her work.

It is clear that Cine-Mujer respected Carrascal's genius and also her typicality, for she represents a hope that many rural women have. It is in this sense that I say that Cine-Mujer made, on the basis of a political analysis, a women's movement film. They selected a subject who was an extraordinary, self-taught craftswoman, and depicted her in a way that showed both her craft and the representative aspects of her life. The editing of the interviews also brings out some of the personal/political structures of a woman's life as these have been articulated by the contemporary (urban) women's movement. In this way, filmmakers from the capital, who had both a political commitment to their subject and a political analysis of woman's condition, revealed in a more generalized way the patterns of many rural women's lives in Latin America. Perhaps it was the artistic problem of balancing the cinematic representation of Carrascal as unique and as typical that made the filmmakers take so long to decide an editing strategy for the film as a whole. It is in this sense that I say that Cine-Mujer made *CARMEN CARRASCAL* on the basis of both their personal rapport with the subject and a feminist political analysis, and indeed this is the process that has been repeated over and over in the making of the feminist biographical documentary video or film.

The Taller Popular de Video originally began in 1980 as a super8 film workshop established with UNESCO funds in Nicaragua. Its goal was to teach members of the Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (the industrial workers union) and the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (the salaried farm workers union) how to make super8 films that would depict the lives, needs, and organizing efforts of the working class. Because super8 film stock is a Kodak monopoly and had to be processed in either Panama or Mexico (and paid for in hard currency), the group always faced a six to eight week delay between shooting and editing. After editing the footage, they then had only their original copy to exhibit. A Dutch foundation and a foreign filmmaking group in Managua, Tercer Cine, provided the Taller the facilities and training to make 3/4" video, and this is the format in which they have continued to work.

Their facilities are rudimentary. They have a portapak, a camera, a used three-tube camera (as of 1984), a cuts-only editing system, and a cassette audio deck and record player to lay in music on their sound tracks. Solidarity workers have provided occasional used U-Matic tapes, batteries for the camera, and a small four-track Radio Shack sound mixer, but the group still works without a waveform monitor, character generator, sound equalizer, or time-base corrector. All their tapes, except their edited masters, are recycled over and over. When a camera person goes out on a shoot, s/he is often given only two twenty-minute cassettes for the shoot -- the ration for the day. There is a Sony repair shop in Managua; and the bill for repairs comes back with a part due in cordobas, the national currency, and a part due in dollars, spent on getting spare parts. To maintain their equipment, the group has to bring in a certain number of jobs that can pay in hard currency, and they usually get several contracts a year from European television or solidarity groups. The Sandinista labor unions themselves could not support an arts project that needed dollars to survive.

There are usually four to six people working in the group. Some have come from the skilled trades (a baker, a grinder of optical lenses, a secretary); some have come from the ranks of grass roots union organizers. None went to college. Two or three have organized trade union or Sandinista youth theater groups. In 1987 they expanded into two separate groups. The Taller de Video Popular now works exclusively with the farmworkers' union and an offshoot of the Taller, Video Alternativo, with the industrial union.

In November 1981 I spent a month in Managua teaching the group. We worked mostly on super8 editing skills. I myself was doing interviews and shooting slides for a slide show (later an experimental videotape), LAS NICAS, about women and daily life in Nicaragua. Following up on our discussions in common, in 1982 the Taller completed a video project on Nicaraguan women, LAS MUJERES. Later, at a collective farm called La Dalia, the Taller did a short biographi-

cal videotape about two women farmworkers there. And in 1985, following the first congress of farm union women, the group did a tape on women in agriculture, focusing on the gains made for women in the union, the persistence of the double work day, the contra attacks on farms, and women's need to do extra labor and learn new work skills so as supplant the production ordinarily done by men now at the front.

One of the most profound changes caused by the Nicaraguan revolution has been in the quality of women's lives. Some changes are aimed at women -- access to jobs and education, for example. Other gains such as literacy training, free health care, food rationing and regional food distribution, and free and compulsory education have drastically improved most women's lives by changing the quality of childrearing and family life. And women's massive participation in the militias, police, and armed forces mean that women bear arms and are crucial for national defense. This affects a whole society's perception of women, including women's own sense of their personal and social strength. Other developments are equally important. For example, in rural areas the farmworkers union established national work norms, naming each task and saying what quantity of labor at that task constitutes a day's work. This means that men and women farmworkers always earn the same for a specified amount of work.

Nicaragua is a culture in constant change. The struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie in has been made more acute by the United States government's funding internal conflicts there. The Taller makes tapes within a labor-union context knowing that the Sandinista government responds almost immediately to organized labor's demands. When grass-roots union organizers tell their constituencies, "To the degree that we are organized, we have political power," the workers have seen the FSLN's practice of responding to their union leadership. In that sense, the Taller's video is workers' video. With pride these videomakers give voice to those who are building the revolution in a self-conscious and often critical way. The Taller concentrates on building the self-representation of the working class. They deal with issues of how to represent the under-represented in aesthetically complex and responsible ways.

The group's work is exhibited on national television and also in union meetings, with the assistance of a Betamax video recorder. The group's work stands out even from that of other Nicaraguan media makers. It is characterized by their grasp of the social richness within a seemingly poor environment, and their artistic capacity to represent that social complexity in visual terms. For they are taping the milieu they live in. (Their salaries are equivalent to those of skilled factory workers, with whom they share the scarcity of basic resources, including food.) In general, the group easily develops a consensus about the political issues and kinds of complexities to be dealt with in a tape. They use interviews with both officials and ordinary people speaking. Their emphasis on ordinary people's political wisdom makes their tapes stand out, even in a Ni-

caraguan context.

SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE

At the times I worked with the Taller, the women in the group included Amina Luna, Miriam Carrero, and Fani Ortiz. However, since aesthetics and politics are similar from one Taller production to another, the style of their tapes that concentrate on women's lives cannot be attributed to women media makers' taking up a "women's theme."

The Taller's tapes are usually analytic and synthesize a number of points of view, expressed in interviews, about a given situation. Biographical portraits that focus on one person are rarely found in their work, and they do not examine emotional life and subjectivity at any great length. Voices on the sound track speak about issues of oppression and resistance in a way that indicates these speakers represent many people's unified voice. When conflicts are articulated, for example, between the Catholic hierarchy and the revolutionary Church in the tape, THE POPE, PILGRIM OF PEACE?, then those conflicts, as represented by speakers in the tapes, indicate whole sectors of society in conflict. Such conflict is represented visually as well, with the hierarchy's affluence, visible in clothes and living environment, being the index of class privilege.

What is characteristic of the Taller's work, and was visible in their earliest super8 films, is that they see working class and rural life as the source of the Nicaraguan revolution. People whom film viewers or onlookers from abroad might see as merely "poor" become sophisticated analysts of the current political situation in the Taller's tapes. The members of the Taller and the people whom they give voice to are what Antonio Gramsci called "organic intellectuals," that is, poor people who develop a keen analysis of their own situation in the course of political activism. The Nicaraguan revolution is full of such people, and they are always the subject of the Taller's tapes.

LA DALIA is a short 12 minute tape, made in 1983. Significantly the title is not a woman's name but that of the farm, La Dalia. The tape does not emphasize individuality as would a North American feminist biographical film. Two women who look very similar narrate a few high points of their autobiographies. The way the figures are intercut, their political unity, and the similarity of their experiences make their stories fit into one flow, as if they were speaking about one woman's life instead of two.⁴¹ Both their similar images and the flow of their story into one "voice" represents farmers' lives on LA DALIA in general and also a whole new kind of rural woman, who may now be an exemplar for many other women in the third world.

We see each of the women at home in a poor environment. The location could be one shack or two. One woman is a militia trainer who is now on maternity leave (I shall refer to her as "the militia trainer") We first see her sitting on a bed in the corner of a room, nursing her two month old daughter and talking to the

camera. The other, whom I shall call "the union organizer," speaks about her union leadership experiences as she is standing by a wooden plank table in a cook shed cleaning a rifle. Both are thin women, with hair pulled back in a bun from which wisps of hair escape and fall over their forehead. They look very much the same, except that one has slightly darker hair.

We see a farmworker's family life, presumably from the point of view of a single mother. Bracket sequences at the tape's beginning and end show the union organizer scrubbing a child in a stream by a waterfall; over the last sequence she says that she has big dreams for her little girl, namely that the child will learn to read. Other times we see the militia organizer serving her older daughter a tortilla or bottle-feeding her baby, who is wrapped in a colorful new blanket.

Intercut are two sets of imagery which convey the changing circumstances in these farmers', especially farm women's, lives. The two sets of images show women in a domestic interior and in militia training. The things the women talk about in the indoors scenes and the also the images themselves suggest that these two worlds for rural women, especially the worlds of child rearing and military defense, are now merged. Furthermore, it is the mother on maternity leave who is by profession a militia trainer, and it is the union organizer who is filmed with her military gear.

As we see the union organizer standing in the cook shed speaking, there is a tin box of cleaning equipment on the table next to her, and a bench full of scuffling children in the background. She tells of the starvation which farmworkers, like many rural people, had faced. She tells how the farmworkers' union won as one of its first demands that farmworkers receive an adequate, balanced diet. She comments that after this regulation came into effect, the workers on her farm protested when their protein ration did not appear, and they rioted. She said she took a leadership role and calmed the men down by remonstrating,

What about before we had a union? Why didn't you scream then? You didn't get eggs at your meal today. When that happened before, none of you would dare speak up about it.

In fact, it is only from conversations with the Taller that I know this woman was a union organizer. The tape presents her position only implicitly, i.e., through her narration of the above incident. The effect of this is that both women talk about political process not as authorities in this or that field but as shapers of the revolutionary movement on the farm. They not only speak with one voice, they speak in general terms as "makers of the revolution"-- which fact is more important to the narrative than any one labeled social position. The two women could each be mothers, active in the union, and participants in military defense.

The combination of image and narration here signals a great change in poor, rural women's lives. Both women are slight and feminine-looking. We notice the union organizer's bracelet as she cleans her gun. But both women are also leaders in the public life on their

farm, with wisdom and a sense of history. The cookshed is now also a site for rifle maintenance; the cook, is responsible for defense. Indeed, a mother has organized the armed defense. As the militia organizer feeds her baby, she tells about how she formed the militia with one other man, and how the two of them kept watch before even having guns. Later she received training to become a militia instructor but will wait till her baby is three months old before going back to that job.

Militia practice provides the other main set of images for the tape. Under another woman's instruction, the union organizer practices drill formations along with about twenty others of all ages. The main camera movement is to track around the militia members giving close-up details of their heads, hands, and military gear, and then reveal in long shot the people moving. Old men, a young woman wearing a flounced dress, the union organizer wearing her uniform along with little red shoes, several people who have only frayed twine for a rifle sling -- all these line up for instruction. The woman in the dress takes aim on one knee, and then we see her lying flat on the ground for prone target practice, laughing self-consciously because of the presence of the camera. These images convey a sense of how defense in Nicaragua is often maintained by ordinary people.

The tape ends with a shot of the mother nursing the baby and her words:

I hope that all the things I dreamed of for myself will become this child's reality. I think that it is our children who will have a full sense of the revolution. Victory really belongs to them.

All the Nicaraguan women I talked to believe in the sacredness of motherhood, and the revolution reinforces that notion. But in LA DALIA we see how that ideology has shifted. It is no longer about mom at home. We see a woman without a man who is a military leader. She speaks as a mother when she talks about why she does what she does -- she sees herself as building the revolution for her children and for the generations to come.

"Fani Bodilla was killed in a contra attack on the agricultural complex, LA DALIA, a few months after this video was made."

In the English-language version of this tape, these words appear over a frozen image of the young woman who had just told us about her life as a farmworkers' organizer. As I sat in Managua with members of the Taller in 1984 and they showed me their work, they said these same words often about someone who appeared before us on the video screen. At one point, videomaker Amina Luna told me about the way a 19-year old farmwoman whom we both knew had been brutally murdered by the contras. She'd been part of a militia defending a farm. They had kept the contras at bay for fifteen hours but then fell. After being captured, this woman was multiply raped and finally dismembered. Hearing about this devastated me. Amina responded, "So was I until I thought about it more." She felt a oneness with the woman who had

been killed, and knew that she herself would fight in the same way, so she could not cry too long.

I mention this incident because the English-language version of the tape creates a narrative climax and a heroine. For the Taller and especially for the rural peoples who are often the subjects of their tapes, the revolution is the hero. Death is ever present, but mothers give up their children and grandchildren to defend that revolution. This is particularly true of the organized working class, which the Taller's work represents. The Taller never sees the necessity to pick out one person's act of valor and foreground it. They know too much about how everyone's effort makes a life for them all. For the Taller and for many poor people, that is not an abstraction. All their opportunities began with a revolution, which they both fought for and which they constantly create. Not only do they share political consensus with the subjects they tape, but their work reflects a way of living with grace under pressure. LA DALIA, like many of their tapes, begins and ends en medias res. It presents women living very much in the present; some of the women's activity conveys a sense of urgency and some, especially the details of childcare and the domestic sphere, seems timeless and full of hope.

POETRY, AND THE REVOLUTION

At various points in LA DALIA, a song comes up over images, often in long shot, of the surrounding environment and the people on the farm. The song's refrain is,

"Always with the trees and the clouds,
They recognize each other.
They confront their own loneliness."

Poetry is a deeply rooted art form in Nicaraguan culture. The national anthem contains the obscure line, "Dawn stopped being a temptation." Subjectivity is expressed in an oblique way in LA DALIA by the repeated use of the above refrain, and using it as a segue to images of militia training. The mother who is a militia organizer has experienced the loneliness of the organizer as well as her own experience when she was an adolescent fighting in the mountains. Yet the song does not state that it is about the experience of fighting in the guerrillas; it only implies it.

The first time that song comes up, it introduces a series of idyllic shots that initiate a sequence detailing aspects of militia training. A landscape of green mountains, a dusty road where a man on a mule is followed by a dog, children playing in muddy pools -- these images lead to the first image of militia training where the trainees run in the background and children play in the foreground. The song is used as a segue in this way two more times, to tie together shots from the domestic sphere with shots of militia training.

The last time the refrain is used it leads into the sequence at the waterfall where the militia organizer is seen washing her child's hair. She says of her child, "And I hope that all the things I dreamed of for myself

will be a reality for her."

The videomakers freely used a ballad narrating the feelings of fighters in the early days of the revolution. It is sung by a man. At the time it was composed, it was perhaps about men even more than about women. Interior to LA DALIA, the song expresses an otherwise unstated aspect of these women's lives. They and the videomakers recognize each other's political commitment instantly, just as the guerrilla fighters do, and know that the interior stress of military preparedness is something that they all have to deal with. That seems one interpretation of the words, "confronting one's loneliness." What at first appears to be a lack of emphasis on women's subjectivity in the Taller's work turns out to be the shared subjectivity of videomakers and subjects whose social being is unified in its experience and goals.

However, two aspects of this song intrigue me, and I sense that a cultural gap prevents me from being satisfied with this interpretation. The first is the reference to being a guerrilla fighter alone in a nature, since these women seem firmly a part of the social life of the farm. The second, related to that, is the word "loneliness." I wonder if it expresses aspects of the women's subjectivity that are not part of ordinary social discourse in Nicaragua, in particular, if the decision to bear arms sets them apart. I know that there are often conflicts in families where the wife wants to go into the reserves, and that common lore has it that such women "don't marry" (which never precludes motherhood). No men, or even adult companionship, is seen in these two women's lives. The song's refrain, with its concluding word, soledad, not only conveys poetic ambiguity but lends a haunting tone, especially since that music is used as a segue between images of military and domestic life.

CONCLUSION

All the women film/videomakers discussed here have as a specific goal expressing the community to itself -- be it the nation, the working class, or women. In the case of Valeria Sarmiento, working in exile, she exposes an ideologically motivated set of behaviors and institutions which cut across class and national lines. A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN breaks through conventional documentary form and deconstructs the patriarchal aspect of popular romantic cinema and music. In that sense, her film can speak to an international audience effectively. She is one of the few Latin American woman media makers who is highly conscious of the ideology of form and who does not take documentary or fiction genre forms as givens. To the degree that she can generalize about cultural experience, she analyzes certain deep structures that sustain sexual oppression which other women filmmakers have not yet broached in depth. And she does this with elegance and wit.

However, A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN still speaks from a middle class point of view, never from the point of view of women and families living on a subsistence

level. Furthermore, it ignores any kind of anthropological specificity, so that it cannot show how specific historical and social circumstances shape women's lives. Furthermore, Sarmiento's cinematic strategies in the editing reduce all the persons filmed to representative examples, and I suspect that many of them would reject the way their image and words are finally used.

CARMEN CARRASCAL gained the enthusiastic approval of its subject. It depicts with lyrical tenderness specific aspects of Carrascal's life, which are organized in the editing to become generalizable. The film has the power to explain other farm women's lives. This is one of the most common tactics of the progressive cinema-verite film, the representative biography. What we do not know, however, is how far such cinematic representation lies from an autobiography or from having a woman like Carmen Carrascal depict her own milieu. Often only the women from the capital, bourgeois women, have filmmaking skills. Yet giving the camera to the "people" does not necessarily represent a solution to having an underrepresented group of women be depicted justly in the mass media. To do that, it is necessary not only to have adequate expressive means, but also a political analysis and an analysis of dominant media forms. Otherwise "home-made" media replicates the most common forms that people know, such as the educational documentary with its patriarchal, controlling voice-off narration.

Other arguments could be made here about self-reflexive vs. transparent documentary forms, but that is not my major concern. A MAN WHEN HE WAS A MAN deconstructed many aspects of popular media and exposed the ideology behind popular cultural forms, yet it, too, was as opaque about issues of class as was CARMEN CARRASCAL. And CARMEN CARRASCAL cannot convey politically important variations in Latin American farmwomen's lives, as for example, the role of migrant farm labor in El Salvador. LA DALIA also uses a cinema-verite style but its focus and videomaker/subject relation is different still from the other two works.

LA DALIA has ties to the feminist biography, but the main tie between the Taller's artists and persons taped is their common commitment to the revolution. In this sense, of all the three production processes examined, perhaps this process represents the closest bond between the participants in front of and behind the camera. It is not that the Taller consults with the interviewees about the editing -- they do not, but that all who are involved see the project of making a videotape as constructing some aspect of social consciousness. The people interviewed trust the Taller to find appropriate expressive means. Furthermore, public exhibition of the work, both on television and through the labor unions, brings both the videomakers and their subjects pride and social validation.

As in many media collectives working on the left, the Taller's production process is rarely specifically oriented around the needs and concerns of its women members. Yet I would assert that such groups often produce "feminist" films and tapes. In LA DALIA, for example, the subjects are women. But even more im-

portant, many of the Taller's tapes depict a model of what it looks like when women feel they can and should construct society as a whole. The revolution has not provided material gain or eradicated machismo, but it has given women, especially poor women, the chance to take social responsibility for the whole range of human experience, from maintaining families to facing and matting out death.⁴²

At the same time, both LA DALIA and CARMEN CARRASCAL take as a given the naturalness and sacredness of motherhood. The ideology of motherhood is never questioned. But in LA DALIA, in particular, the questions remain unanswered: Who takes care of the children when the mothers are fighting? What are the structures of the extended family network by which women assist each other and make a limited rebellion against a father/husband's oppression possible? This is hinted at in CARMEN CARRASCAL, in which Carrascal's children live with a family in a distant town so as to go to school. The social structures deriving from extended family networks are political resistance structures in the third world, but they may also be structures of oppression. Like the myth of romantic love which Sarmiento shows covers over some of men's worst behavior, the myth of woman's natural need and capacity to be a mother may cover over other forms of oppression, for example, women's lower status in the workplace or relegation to jobs like maid.

Third world women media makers often deal explicitly with women's issues, usually tracing these out in a broad social context. They take up issues of sexual politics, especially rape, reproductive rights, and prostitution. They present the double day of salaried labor and housework imposed on women who work outside the home. They make films and tapes about women's responsibilities for domestic life and the tensions that exist for women there. They show women struggling to enter the public sphere on an equal footing with men. They frequently present an angry view of the sexual double standard. The women who speak in these films often speak the voice of the disfranchised and poor.

Such media works speak to women viewers across national boundaries. Even though I raise the caveat of cultural specificity, it is clear that these films are structured in ways that seek to convey generalizations that we can call "feminist." Their wider distribution will create a more profound sense of a "women's community" that exists throughout the world.⁴³

NOTES

1. The word "feminist" has pejorative connotations for many women of color in the United States and in the socialist bloc, including Cuba and Nicaragua. Its use was extensively debated in the First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting in Bogota in 1981, where the participants voted by a narrow margin to continue using the term and reclaim it from its bourgeois context.

The use of the word "feminist" to define the meeting

was a political decision and the result of much discussion. ... Many women in Latin America are prejudiced against this word, which has been so distorted by male-dominated media and institutions. Some feminists felt that it would alienate women, especially the more marginalized ones. However, we have chosen to reclaim the term and identify ourselves as feminists. ... Certain political activists, in particular, felt that class struggle takes precedence over women's struggles. Other women also active in political parties did define themselves as feminists. All this brought out discussion about women's double oppression, the intertwining of class and gender oppression. One positive outcome of the meeting is that the feminist cause is becoming less alien and increasingly less frightening to the large number of women who passed from skepticism or ignorance to conviction after their encounter with feminism at the [Bogota] meeting. -- Lima Organizing Collective for the 2nd Meeting and ISIS Editorial Collective, ISIS International Woman's Journal, No.1, 1984, pp.3-4.

2. I have written on this phenomenon in "Networking," forthcoming in JUMP CUT, 1989.
3. DeeDee Halleck, "Women and the Media: The 1986 Havana Film Festival," Afterimage, 14:8 (March 1987).
4. The word "here" referring to the United States indicates the intellectual limit of this article, that is, it is written from the outside. I speak Spanish and make video in Spanish, and am very concerned that Latin American women's media work be more widely seen in the United States. But even a critic from the United States who is tied to her subject by bonds of solidarity has a privilege to see films, travel, and publish in magazines and books that are read internationally, privileges that third world women media makers often do not have. The very notion of seeing, teaching, and studying third world films "here" has to be considered with the same suspicion we must feel as we use the tools and research of anthropology. Within that skeptical context and with the hope that this study will be of use, I proceed.
5. Women Make Movies distributes A MAN WHEN HE IS A MAN and CARMEN CARRASCAL, along with a substantial number of films and videotapes made by other Latin American women artists in a series called "Punto de Vista Latina." 225 Lafayette Street, Suite 212, NY, NY 10012. (212) 925-0606. LA DALIA is distributed along with other productions by Nicaraguan videomakers by XChange TV, PO Box 586, NY, NY 10009. (212) 260-6565. Another series of tapes which includes many works made by women is an extensive collection of excerpts from Latin American television and progressive groups' grassroots video--Democracy in Communication. It is distributed as a package which can be programmed over several nights of screenings. Democracy in Communication, 124 Washington Place, New York, NY 10014. (212) 463-0108.
6. Zuzana M. Pick, unpublished interview with Vale-

ria Sarmiento, 1985. Translation by Lesage. I am grateful to Zuzana Pick, Debra Zimmerman, and Catherine Benamou for sharing their filmographies and files with me.

7. Pick interview

8. Pick interview.

9. Pick interview.

10. Pick interview.

11. Interview with Sarmiento (anonymous), "Amérique Latine: les machos piégés par une caméra 'invisible', Marie Claire, Oct. 1982

12. Pick interview.

Interview with Françoise Audé, "Entretien avec Valeria Sarmiento," Positif No 296, October 1985. Translation by Lesage.

13. Audé interview.

14. On Dec. 29, 1982, Le Monde published a long extract from that letter, dated Dec. 13, from Dr. Fabio Rosabal, Charge d'Affaires, written to the director of Channel 2, Pierre Desgraupes. It was reprinted in Positif No. 296, October 1985, in the article interviewing Sarmiento, "Entretien avec Valeria Sarmiento," by Françoise Audé.

15. Audé interview.

16. Pick interview.

17. Julia Lesage, "Women's Rage," in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Reprinted from JUMP CUT, No 31 (1985).

18. Marcela Toro, "The Macho Man Exposed--in Costa Rica," Open City 1:4 (Montreal), April-May, 1984.

19. In French and Spanish reviews of the film in this woman is referred to as "the prostitute." I could find no indication in either the mise-en-scene in an apartment or in the woman's words to justify that label. I wonder if she were referred to as a prostitute because she spoke openly about being sexually active. If she is a prostitute, then the film's condemnation of both her brother and the women in her family gains in irony, since the family's behavior would be considered more "normal" in social terms.

20. Pick interview.

21. Interview with Sarmiento (anonymous), "Amérique Latine: les machos piégés par une caméra 'invisible,' Marie Claire, October 1982. Translation by Lesage.

22. Pick interview.

23. Interview in Marie Claire.

24. Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," Studio International, Nov.-Dec. 1985.

25. Zuzana Pick, "Chilean Cinema: Ten Years of Exile (1973-1983)," JUMP CUT, No 33, 1988.

27. Interview with Pick.

28. Interview with Audé. I analyze how the incest theme may have a "hook" for women viewers of D.W. Griffith's BROKEN BLOSSOMS. See my essay, "Artful Racism, Artful Rape," JUMP CUT, No.26, Decem-

ber. 1981. Reprinted in JUMP CUT: Hollywood, Politics, and Counter Cinema, ed. Peter Steven, (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1985) and Home Is Where the Heart Is, ed. Christine Gledhill, (London: British Film Institute, 1986).

29. Sarmiento quoted by Jacqueline Mouesca, "Valeria Sarmiento, Cineasta Chilena: La Otra Lectura de Corin Tellado, desde Paris," Apsi (Santiago, Chile), Dec. 2-15, 1985.

30. Interview with Marcela Toro, "The Macho Man exposed--in Costa Rica," Open City, 1:4 (Montreal), April-May, 1984

31. See Julia Lesage, "The Hegemonic Female Fantasy," Film Reader, No. 5, Northwestern University, Evanston IL, 1982.

32. Chuck Kleinhans, "Form, Politics, Makers and Contexts: Basic Issues for a Theory of Radical Political Documentary," in Show Us Life--Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Political Documentary, edited by Thomas Waugh (Scarecrow Press, 1984).

33. "From One Country to the Next: Sara Montgomery Interviews Colombian Filmmaker, Dora Ramirez," Screen, 26:3-4 (May-Aug, 1985), pp. 96-100. This is the major source of my information about the group's production process, along with "Les films de Sara," Interview with Sara Bright by Isabel Guisan, 24 Heures (Geneva, Switzerland), May 27, 1982.

34. Betamax video recorders have now become a major mode of media distribution in third world rural areas. For an example of their political effectiveness, see my interview with Daniel Solis, "Betamax and Super8 in Revolutionary El Salvador," JUMP CUT, No. 29, Feb. 1984.

35. Julia Lesage, "The Feminist Documentary--Politics and Aesthetics," in Show Us Life--Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Political Documentary, edited by Thomas Waugh (Scarecrow Press, 1984). In this essay I discuss the relation between biographical documentary form and the relation to the biographical documentary to the women's movement.

36. Angela Davis , "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," The Black Scholar, December 1971.

37. "Women in Agriculture, World Survey of the Role of Women in Development, Report to the Secretary General, World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, Keyna, Nairobi, July 15-26, 1985. See also Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, Women's Worth: Sexual Economics and the World of Women (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). The statistics are outdated in the book but it provides a useful analysis of the interconnecting issues."

38. "Women in Agriculture."

39. Interview with Sarah Montgomery, Screen: We worked for two years on the script in every possible way. We had the whole script on cards and used to play, as with playing cards, trying out every possibility until we finally came to what the film is.

40. I had a similar experience in taping interviews with women in Nicaragua in 1981, knowing that my audience would want to know about the way the revolution dealt with homosexuality. "I don't know any homosexuals," was the response I invariably received. However, at other points the women expressed gratitude for the interview, particularly for questions like, "Compare your daughter's life with yours when you were her age." It seems that a discussion focused on U.S. feminist concerns let the Nicaraguan women I spoke to crystallize many of their own thoughts.

41. I took them to be same person even after I had analyzed the film. Martha Wallner of XChange TV pointed out the error, and I found out more about the two women when I talked to Amina Luna of the Taller. The same kind of narrative structure is used in Native American filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's film, Mother of Many Children, a documentary made with the Canadian Film Board. In that film, the daily life experiences of women and girls from many Canadian tribes are cut together in one uninterrupted flow and with no comment about the change of locale or change of group being depicted.

42. The women in the reserve army in Nicaragua do not go into combat, but all women in arms in rural areas do. And the contras' vengeance on women in uniform is to torture them specifically as women.

43. I wish to thank Anne Fischel and Jose Arroyo for their thoughtful critiques of an earlier draft of this essay.